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THE

BISHOP OF BRISTOL'S

SERMON

BEFORE

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

JANUARY 31, 1785.

Die Jovis, 3 *Februarii*, 1785.

Ordered,

BY the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament aſſembled, That the Thanks of this Houſe be, and they are hereby, given to the Lord Biſhop of *Briſtol*, for the Sermon by him preached before this Houſe, on *Monday* laſt, in the Abbey-Church, *Weſtminſter*. And he is hereby deſired to cauſe the ſame to be forthwith printed and publiſhed.

ASHLEY COWPER,

Cler'. Parliamentor'.

C. Wilson (C.) Bishop of

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

IN THE

ABBEY-CHURCH, WESTMINSTER,

ON MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 1785:

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED

TO BE OBSERVED AS THE ANNIVERSARY OF

THE MARTYRDOM OF KING CHARLES I.

BY CHRISTOPHER LORD BISHOP OF BRISTOL.

LONDON:

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MDCCLXXXV.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DANIEL IV. 17.

THE MOST HIGH RULETH IN THE KINGDOM OF MEN, AND GIVETH IT TO WHOMSOEVER HE WILL.

THAT God created the Heavens and the Earth, is a truth very ſeldom brought into debate. The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the Firmament ſheweth his handy-work. There is neither ſpeech nor language where this voice is not heard among them. But that He ruleth in the kingdom of men, is a point not ſo univerſally admitted.

The uniformity obſervable in the motion of the heavenly bodies—the regular returns of day and of the ſeaſons, proclaim the preſence of a ſuperintending Power; but the inſtability experienced in human governments ſeems, by the ſame reaſoning, to betray a reproachful weakneſs in its ruler.

Others,

Others, on this uniformity, have grounded a doubt, whether He, who formed this material world, ever encumbered Himſelf with its guidance and direction.

They can obſerve with aſtoniſhment this beautiful fabric, can admire the proportion and adjuſtment of its parts, can trace out with accuracy the regularity of its movements, and preſcribe with preciſion the laws by which it conducts itſelf; but they hold it more becoming the dignity of the Divine Architect, ſo to finiſh and compleat His workmanſhip, as to require no need of reparation or further aſſiſtance; but, like an exquiſite piece of mechaniſm, once put into motion, to continue its revolutions to all eternity.

Thus, by regularity, or want of regularity, the Author of all nature is equally excluded from directing the works of His own hands!

Poſſibly the Almighty might have conſtituted this globe after the model of theſe philoſophers. He might have iſſued out at once His all-commanding Fiat, and ceaſed immediately from His labours. But ſhall we ſuppoſe, that the dignity of a Being of infinite activity conſiſts in ceſſation from labour—in indolence and reſt?

"Haſt thou not known? Haſt thou not heard, that "the everlaſting God, the creator of the ends of the "earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"

Shall

Shall we ſuppoſe that He, who ſtretched out the Heavens by His diſcretion, who hung the earth upon nothing, who launched out this globe into the vaſt expanſe, would leave it to periſh in the deep abyſs without pilot, without conductor?

True Philoſophy would have taught them, that what they vaguely term mechanical powers, and the laws of gravitation, by which this orb ſeems to govern itſelf, and preſerve its poiſe in the planetary ſyſtem, are in reality the never-ceaſing exertions of the ſame Supreme Power which gave birth to its exiſtence, and without which, it muſt immediately fall back into its original chaos.

But allowing this material fabrick to be governed by the inceſſant interpoſition of its Creator, and to obey from neceſſity his all-powerful impreſſions, yet what will be ſaid for the diſorder and miſ-rule in the kingdoms of men?

Shall we charge confuſion to the God of Order? or ſhall we aſcribe theſe commotions to the free agency of man? Shall we conclude, that theſe ſeeming irregularities may be ſubſervient, in the all-comprehenſive mind of God, to ſome future purpoſe in His divine adminiſtration? Or ſhall we ſuppoſe Him an unconcerned ſpecta-

tor of the moral and intellectual, though he governs with abſolute ſway the material, world?

This is ſuppoſing the Creator leſs anxious for His nobleſt productions, the moſt animated figures in His work, which, on account of their freedom, demand His conſtant attention, than for dead inactive matter.

Can we for a moment apprehend, that having formed this world, and peopled it with inhabitants of various orders and deſcriptions; ſome with inſtinctive powers, to feed, to defend, to propagate their ſpecies; others with rational faculties, to ſurvey with adoration the productions of his power, to admire the wiſdom of His comprehenſive deſigns, to acknowledge His goodneſs in preparing for their uſe this habitable globe? Shall He be thought unwilling to take under His protection this moſt highly finiſhed part of His creation?

Whatever the Philoſopher might ſurmiſe with regard to the guidance of inanimate matter, yet to preſide over the moral and intellectual world, to rule in the kingdom of men, muſt be allowed an object, worthy the attention of infinite goodneſs.

By what ſecret influence He guides His rational creatures is known to Him only, who diſcerneth the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Man

Man is not governed by compulſive mechanical powers. Under the particular Providence of God, he may be moved occaſionally by ſecret ſprings, inviſible to human obſervation. Under His more general Providence, he is directed by laws ſuited to his nature, even the immutable laws of rectitude.

He is ſent into the world, where life and death, good and evil, are placed before him for his guidance: He is, nevertheleſs, free to form his own choice, to follow the impulſe of his paſſions, and, for the temporary indulgence of a favorite appetite, to forfeit his claim to the happineſs marked out to him by infinite wiſdom.

But to prevent the conſequence of an imprudent option, ſhall man be deprived of that liberty which is of the very eſſence of his nature? This might preſerve him, 'tis true, from a ſtate of miſery, inevitably reſulting from his abuſe of this bleſſing; but would this be deemed the happineſs of a rational being—of a moral agent? It would be defacing the leading feature in his compoſition. The liberty of a moral agent conſiſts in purſuing the dictates of reaſon, his ſpecific character—in a freedom to conform his conduct to rules, perfective of his nature, and productive of his happineſs. Abſolute, unbounded liberty is all ideal. Every created being muſt be ſubject to ſome rule. Creation implies depen-

dence, and every dependent creature muſt have relation to ſome ſuperior power.

His firſt duty is to God, his Creator. He, who gave him exiſtence, has the firſt claim to his obedience.

If he be created a ſocial being, the relative duties of ſociety will be bound upon him by the ſame authority. That man is made a ſocial being, he carries a convincing proof in his own breaſt. Society is the natural object of his affections and attachments. Or if not drawn by the finer feelings of humanity, neceſſity will drive him, from a conſciouſneſs of his own inſufficiency, to ſeek refuge in ſociety. But communities eſtabliſhed on this ground—compounded of members of different complexions—of men, who ſeek ſecurity only to their ſeparate intereſts, will evidently require ſome general tie, ſome common bond of union for obtaining and preſerving their general welfare. Every man, therefore, as the price of his protection, ſurrenders up a part of his natural rights, and binds himſelf voluntarily to an equal ſubmiſſion to the regulations of the Public; and, in the event, he will find it his intereſt to obey theſe general laws, though ſometimes attended with partial inconvenience. But when boiſterous paſſions and ſelfiſh attachments take the lead, the dictates of reaſon form but a weak barrier againſt the reſtleſs attacks of the unprincipled libertine. Regardleſs of the public peace, his

his lawleſs purſuits diſdain controul. Diſcontented perhaps with his rank, diſappointed in his ſtation, he attempts to reſume his natural rights, ſpurns at ſubmiſſion, overleaps the bounds of ſubordination, and introduces confuſion into the whole ſyſtem.

Hence ariſes the neceſſity of ſome more ſtable authority, which may give reſpect and power to the laws of man, and ſtrength and vigour to their adminiſtration.

To ſearch for this vital ſpirit, this invigorating influence among the ſons of men, is to ſearch for the remedy in the diſeaſe, to draw ſtrength from weakneſs, and ſtability from imperfection. The only ſource from whence this ſalutary ſanction can be derived, is that inexhauſtible fountain of all power, that ſupreme potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

The Apoſtle, ſenſible of this univerſal defect in all human inſtitutions, grounds the principle of ſubmiſſion on this ſupreme authority. Submit yourſelves, for the Lord's ſake. Let every ſoul be ſubject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. Wherefore we muſt needs be ſubject, not only for wrath—not only from fear of the magiſtrate, who is a revenger, to execute wrath upon them that do evil; but alſo for conſcience

ſcience ſake, remembering that he is the Miniſter of God—that conſequently thoſe who reſiſt this power, by reſiſting the ordinance of God, ſhall receive to themſelves condemnation.

Government then being the inſtitution of God, ſubmiſſion and obedience is an equal duty bound upon all by divine authority. The bonds of ſociety, thus ſtrengthened, ought to produce in moral agents as much uniformity as mechanical powers in the material world.

The force of this principle of conſcience, of acting under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God, was never more oſtentatiouſly avowed, or its real influence more ſhamefully proſtituted, than in the melancholy proceedings we are this day called together to commemorate.

Under a moſt hypocritical pretence to the guidance of religious impulſe, to divine communications, and ſeeking God in prayer, crafty and deſigning men were enabled, ſo far to inflame the paſſions of the multitude, as to gain their concurrence in dethroning their legal ſovereign, and imbruing their hands in royal blood.

Had redreſs of ſtate grievances been the only object, redreſs might have been obtained on milder terms. The

ſovereign

ſovereign had, moſt undoubtedly, incroached on the liberties of the ſubject, by an exertion of power, unwarranted by his prerogative; but a firm and temperate reſiſtance by men of unſuſpected integrity, might have convinced the prince, without wounding the conſtitution, that he had exceeded the bounds of legal authority, and reſtored peace and unanimity to a free and determined people.

The prerogative had been exerciſed, with little reſtraint, through many ſucceſſions; but exerciſed by princes, who, conſulting the national honour, had by ſuch exertions entailed ſubſtantial bleſſings on their ſubjects. The father of the ſovereign we are now lamenting, entertained and cultivated the higheſt notions of kingly power, in words and idle theory, without much jealouſy; but when theſe viſionary notions were called into action by the ſon, they ſoon ſpread the alarm, and opened the eyes of the friends of liberty to their common danger. Every movement, therefore, was watched with a jealous eye; and unhappily, occaſion too ſoon called for all the firmneſs and reſolution of the conſtitutional guardians of the privileges of the ſubject to reſiſt the incurſions of an encroaching prerogative.

They ſaw the danger, they felt for their country, they reſiſted the ſtrides of arbitrary power. Like friends

of

of legal liberty, they appealed to the laws. The voice of law was too feeble, the expounders too dependent, to decide with impartiality. The judges joined in authorizing the unconſtitutional meaſure of raiſing ſupplies from the ſubject without his parliamentary conſent, without the concurrence of the guardians of the public purſe.

The fences of the conſtitution thus broken down, no wonder the contending parties ruſhed in at the breach, and, in the heat of ſtrife and debate, produced a ſcene of anarchy and confuſion. The original ground of complaint was overlooked and loſt in the general alarm. The cloud, which at firſt appeared no bigger than a man's hand, ſoon overſpread the heavens with blackneſs, and threatened an univerſal deluge.

In this night of confuſion, the enemy ſowed his tares. Religious liberty being as little underſtood as civil controul, the cauſe of fanaticiſm became the cauſe of God, and, inſtead of a full toleration to worſhip his Maker, every man according to his own ſentiments, the deluded populace were driven into all the wilds of enthuſiaſm.

The leaders of conſtitutional reſiſtance, whoſe object was to ſettle government on a firm and legal baſis, were now

now over-ruled by the heat and violence of intemperate men, who, deſigning nothing leſs than the reſtoration of limited monarchy, introduced confuſion into their counſels, in order to introduce, under the maſk of liberty, every evil work.

The prince ſaw his error too late. The ſtorm raged too high for the ſtill voice of reaſon. Men of moderation were borne away by the torrent. No place was left for cool diſcuſſion. The king receded from his demands. Unfortunately his conceſſions ſeemed extorted. His ſincerity was diſtruſted. Security was demanded for the performance of his profeſſions. The moſt ample ſecurity, by perpetuating the parliament, produced no ſatisfaction. Having proceeded thus far, nothing could ſecure their perſonal ſafety, but uſurping to themſelves the executive power—nothing would ſatisfy their ambition, but ſeizing on the inheritance.

The remnant therefore begun with ſhamefully entreating his ſervants. They drove from his counſels the ableſt of his adviſers. And when the Lord of the vineyard came, hoping to reap the fruit of his conceſſions; when he truſted they would reverence his appearance, they ſeized his perſon, caſt him out of the vineyard, arraigned him at the bar of a mock tribunal, and, with

all the ſolemnity of legal judicature, condemned, dethroned, and delivered him to the block.

Thus fell, at one ſtroke, the king and conſtitution of this realm by the hands of violent and ambitious ſubjects; and thus were the people judicially deprived of that liberty they had too wantonly abuſed, by Him who ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomſoever He will.

Notwithſtanding the meaſures of the Prince had been too arbitrary and violent to admit of juſtification, yet the loſs of a Crown might have atoned for the treſpaſs, and left the errors of the Man to a milder puniſhment. The royal prerogative undefined; the violent exertions of it familiarized by uſage; high notions of hereditary right, imbibed in youth, ſtrengthened by education, encouraged by courtiers, confirmed by the ſages of the law, and ſanctioned by the miniſters of religion—what could be expected from a prince thus circumſtanced, but a miſtaken reſolution to tranſmit this power unimpaired to his poſterity? Flattered with the title of the Anointed of the Lord, and drawing his divine right from the Jewiſh inſtitution, he forgot that the rule preſcribed by the Goſpel, was the happineſs of his ſubjects; that he was appointed the miniſter of God to them for good. Having corrected this error in the ſchool of affliction,

tion, he relinquiſhed his maxims, ſubmitted to the public judgment, and atoned for his error with his blood.

The pretended friends, but real enemies, of conſtitutional freedom—I ſpeak not of thoſe patriotic leaders, who in the day of danger ſtood forward, upon principle, the champions of public liberty, the friends of mankind, but of bold and deſigning men of far other views—theſe ſought to erect a government on a different baſis, and, having dethroned the king, trampled upon the nobles, and expelled the repreſentatives of the people, eſtabliſhed a power unknown to this conſtitution, more arbitrary, more deſtructive of civil and religious liberty, than any this nation had ever experienced.

The national power, the military fame of this country was perhaps never more regarded, than at this period, by foreign ſtates; yet the ſplendor was not the clear, uniform light of an eſtabliſhed government; it was rather the blaze of a comet, ſpreading apprehenſion and uncertainty over the whole ſyſtem of European politics. Yet, dazling as this importance might appear to a deluded public, the more ſubſtantial comforts of domeſtic life were never leſs conſulted. Under this ſelf-erected power, the lives and fortunes of the people were held, as it were, at the will of the lord. Deprived of its reli-

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gious as well as civil eſtabliſhment, and ſubject to the irregular caprice of fanaticiſm, enthuſiaſm, and ſuperſtition, thoſe enemies of all rational religion, this afflicted land *mourned* during the life of the uſurper. A longer uſurpation was projected, but He who pulleth down one and ſetteth up another, diſappointed the devices of the crafty, ſo that their hands could not perform their enterprize. In their rage to eraſe every veſtige of monarchical government, they left the "ſtump "of the roots thereof in the earth." At the end of the days, the heart of the nation was changed. Their underſtanding returned to them; they ſighed for their antient conſtitution. "The tree grew and was ſtrong," and the ſubject rejoiced to take ſhelter under its branches.

Let Us then, whoſe peculiar happineſs it is to live under the protection of this revived conſtitution, ſtand ſtill, and revere the ſuperintending providence of God, who thus marvelouſly produced order from anarchy, and light out of darkneſs!

Let us lament, on this day of humiliation, the ſins of our forefathers, which brought down upon them the ſeverity of God's wrath and diſpleaſure; not faſtidiouſly ſuppoſing, that they on whom theſe calamities fell were ſinners above all other generations, but aſſuredly knowing,

ing, that if, like them, we wantonly abuſe the bleſſings of liberty, we ſhall inherit the like condemnation. There is a chain in the moral as well as natural government of the world. The ſame cauſes have an uniform tendency to produce the ſame events. Illegal extenſions of prerogative will lead the way to reſiſtance and lawleſs outrage. Impatience of legal controul will open the door to deſpotiſm and oppreſſion.

Let the Rulers of the people therefore be temperate in the exerciſe of authority; leſt, by betraying the ſymptoms of an arbitrary diſpoſition, they raiſe in the ſubject, ever jealous of his liberty, a ſpirit of diſcontent, diſloyalty and reſiſtance; and in the end abridge, what they wiſhed to enlarge, the power and influence of the crown.

Let the Subject confine himſelf to the duties of his ſtation, not raſhly intruding into counſels above his comprehenſion, or preſuming to cenſure and reprove, where he ought to obey; leſt by ſpreading the contagion of diſaffection, of lawleſs impatience and wanton turbulence, he ſhould authorize a degree of ſeverity in his rulers, which may finally encroach upon his conſtitutional liberty.

Let All parties join their endeavours to repreſs that univerſal ſpirit of licentiouſneſs, which ſeems to have over-

flowed

flowed the whole nation, and levelled the bounds of every order and diſtinction; till the very ſubordination of ſociety ſeems a reſtraint upon natural liberty, and the juſt and regular execution of law an effort of arbitrary power.

If we retain any regard, any eſteem for our excellent conſtitution, let us unite in ſupporting it in its native purity; not as modelled by the airy viſions of ſpeculative writers, but founded on the practice and experience of ſucceſſive ages; not unguardedly tampering with the internal ſprings and wheels of government; not raſhly attempting to invigorate the regal, or the popular branch, beyond its proportional ſtrength; but remembering that the ſuperior excellence of the machine conſiſts in the relative force of each limb, and the true balance and adjuſtment of all its parts.

Let every man ſubmit himſelf to the eſtabliſhed laws of ſociety, as the inſtitution of the Author of ſociety. On any other ground it will be in vain to think of binding the reſtleſs ambition, or unbridled licentiouſneſs of men, to the public welfare. The furtheſt human laws can reach is to the outward action. The ſprings of the heart are not within their cognizance. Theſe are known only to Him who underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. To Him therefore we muſt ultimately look up for the ſanction of our laws. Without this

ſanction,

ſanction, the bond of human obligations will be as a thread of tow when it toucheth the fire. Without the fear of God, the fear of man will be of no avail. The fabric we ſo much admire will ſtand on a ſandy foundation. It may be erected with all the ſkill and ingenuity of human invention, formed and faſhioned in all its parts in the juſt proportions of art and contrivance, compacted by that which every joint ſupplieth; yet if the materials be put together with untempered mortar, if the Divine cement be wanting, if the Moſt High ſhall for a moment withdraw His protecting hand, the ſtately pile muſt bow to the overflowings of prerogative, or to the artificial breath of popular clamour. It may ſtand, may bear the appearance of ſtability during the peaceful diſpoſition of its inhabitants; but when the floods come and the winds blow—whenever the ſtorm of civil diſſentions begins to rage high, great will be the fall of it.

Let our obedience therefore be grounded on an awful ſenſe of the perpetual ſuperintendence of Him, whoſe eyes are upon the ways of man, and ſeeth all his goings. And may our juſtly revered conſtitution, the pride and boaſt of this nation, the envy and admiration of the ends of the earth, found its ſtability on the rock of ages, under the particular guidance of the Moſt High, who ruleth univerſally in the kingdoms of men!

FINIS.

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